

Learners' Evaluation of Student-Prepared Grammar Activities: The Effect on Intrinsic Motivation

Mitsuko Suzuki

Graduate School of Humanities and Social Science University of Tsukuba

Keywords: EFL, grammar, student-centered approach, intrinsic motivation

Abstract

In an English as foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching context, where sources of stimulation for learning English are limited, creating an interesting language class is imperative in raising the learners' intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998). Unfortunately, as previous studies have reported, Japanese EFL learners tend to lose interest in learning English as these students proceed to the next grade level (Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008). Among the many possible reasons for this situation, traditional teacher-centered classrooms, where students are rarely offered opportunities to use the language creatively, seem to reduce Japanese EFL learners' motivation.

In this study, an alternative approach was tested in a university EFL class. Unlike the traditional teacher-centered method, university students in this study were required to create their own grammar activity. The stu-

dents' motivational reaction to this new attempt was examined through a modified version of Ryan's (1982) Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) and open-ended questionnaire. The result of this study will likely help language teachers to gain a better understanding on how to develop students' intrinsic motivation in an EFL situation.

Introduction

How grammar should be taught in language classes has been under discussion for the last few decades. Up to the late 1960's, the focus of second language (L2) education was primarily on grammatical aspect of the target language (Richards, 2006). This traditional approach was gradually replaced with a more communicative approach. This shift from a form-based, or *focus on forms*, to a meaning-based approach helped L2 learners practice authentic language skills required in their real life (Richards, 2006). However, L2 learners do need to gain accuracy to some extent. As a

possible solution, L2 educators have now mostly agreed “on the importance of some form-focused instruction within the communicative framework” (Brown, 2007, p.421). Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1997) refer to this new trend as “a turning point” (p. 141) in communicative language teaching. By combining the two different approaches, “explicit, direct elements are gaining significance in teaching communicative abilities and skills” (p. 147).

Despite the contemporary trend to integrate form-focused teaching into the communicative approach, typically, Japanese EFL classes have placed primary emphasis on the traditional grammar translation method (Matsunaga, 2007). In fact, according to a national survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2008), in the high school English I courses that focus on basic grammar and its usage, only 4.8% of the classes opportune students to interact with peers in English. As one of the reasons why form-focused instruction is still dominant in the Japanese EFL education, Underwood (2012) pointed out the effect of entrance examination. Through interviews with 16 Japanese English teachers, Underwood (2012) found out that the importance of interactive class was accepted among the teachers. However, the preparation for the highly-competitive university entrance exam has long impeded the implementation of a more communicative approach (Underwood, 2012). To be more precise, because oral communication skills are not tested in the entrance exam, most Japanese EFL classes concentrate on English grammar translation and end up choosing a teacher-centered approach (Sakui, 2004). As scholars have claimed over the years, such an approach, where the teacher

has considerable control over the activity in class, is likely to encourage “little motivation to go beyond grammar analogies, translations and rote exercises.” (Brown, 2007, p.19).

It must be noted here that the form-focused approach itself is not necessarily linked with the traditional teacher-centered class. Focus on grammatical structures could also be incorporated into a learner-centered class (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997). For instance, Loewen (2004) argues that a student-initiated focus on form can happen when the learners “seek information about linguistic items as the need arises during meaning-focused activities” (p.86). Long (1991) also emphasized the importance of activities that learners could recognize and acquire linguistic features spontaneously. As Long (1991) claims, a clear line should be drawn between such activities and other tasks that *focus on forms*.

Along with the benefit of a more meaningful grammar learning, the learner-centered approach could also enhance the learners’ intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a type of motivation that is enhanced by enjoyable, interesting and self-rewarding tasks. Numerous studies have already found a relationship between intrinsic motivation and the student-centered approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997). However, few of these studies have targeted low-level learners. A closer examination on how the learners react to different types of activities would provide useful insights on how EFL teachers could motivate such students.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether an attempt to task the learners to create and implement their own grammar activities in an EFL class could enhance their intrinsic motivation. The present study focused on the following questions:

- 1) Are learners more intrinsically motivated to learn in the student- prepared activity than teacher-prepared grammar activity?
- 2) In student-prepared activities, what motivational variables are strongly correlated with students' intrinsic motivation? Are those variables different from those of teacher-prepared grammar activity? If so, how and why are they different?

The results and implications of this grammar project will be discussed below.

Methodology

Participants

The current study examined 44 Japanese EFL learners in Soka University of Japan. These learners were grouped and enrolled in a beginner-level class, according to their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)/ Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores. This 90-minute class was held for twice a week for 15 weeks. More than half of the participants were freshmen (68.9%), but some sophomores (2.2%), juniors (26.7%), and seniors (2.2%) were also enrolled. While all the freshmen participants were law majors, those students who were in their sophomore, junior, and senior years were either economics or literature majors. Out of the 44 participants, 35.6% were female learners and 64.4% were male learners. Before these learners participated in this current research, a written informed consent statement was distributed, signed and collected together with the questionnaire, in order to ensure the purpose of the study, as well as to secure respondents' confidentiality.

Data Collection Instrument

The data for this current study was collected through a questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first section of the questionnaire employed a modified version of Ryan's (1982) Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), which is a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire aimed to assess learner's motivational variables related to a certain activity. Out of the six variables that 45 questions in the IMI measures, the following four are the major variables in this study:

1. *Enjoyment* subscale measures the degree of intrinsic motivation the learners experience through the target activity. Seven items such as "I enjoyed doing this activity very much" are included in this subscale.
2. *Competence* is measured by six items to show learners' belief in their capability to accomplish the target activity.
3. *Value/Usefulness* indicates how meaningful the target activity was to the learners. In this study, six items were marked to indicate how helpful the activity was to understand a certain grammar point.
4. *Relatedness* informs the sense of intimacy and connection the learners find through the target activity. Six items, such as "I'd like to have a chance to interact with this person more often," are included.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended items. These items asked about the advantages, disadvantages, and impressions of the two activities. Since the English proficiency level of the current study's participants is at the basic level, both of the sections were explained and answered in Japanese, in order to gain a more informative description.

Procedure and Data Analysis

In the present study, two questionnaires were distributed to compare the teacher-prepared and student-prepared grammar activities. In regards to the teacher-prepared activity, the questionnaire was distributed and collected in week five. The questionnaires were filled out and collected during the class time. This week seemed the best possible time, since the students had ample experience to fully form impressions about teacher-prepared activities. Most of the activities were designed for communicative practice. For instance, students were often given information-gap activities that required the use of target grammar point. Students had to interview each other to fill in the gap. Each of these activities was supplemented with a brief grammatical explanation by the teacher.

A questionnaire asking about the student-prepared activity was administered three weeks after the first questionnaire. During these three weeks, the students were given several hours to create a grammar activity during class time. Students formed a team of three to five and decided a particular grammar point to focus on. The grammar points were limited to those covered in the course. If more than one group wanted to be in charge of a certain grammar point, the students negotiated with each other. These grammar activities were shared in class on week eight. Various activities were developed by the students. For instance, one of the groups made an English picture book that contained blanks in the sentence. Readers needed to fill in the blank using the correct grammar to read through this book. The questionnaire concerning the student-prepared activity were distributed and collected in the following class.

Quantitative data of both questionnaires were analyzed through t-test, in order to examine whether the students reacted differently to the two activities. Furthermore, for each questionnaire, the correlation between *Enjoyment* and other IMI variables were examined. After these statistical analyses, the open-ended questions were coded and divided in accordance to the six IMI variables. By combining this qualitative data, the result from quantitative data was further analyzed and interpreted.

Result

Comparison of IMI Variables

In order to determine whether the students' reaction to the teacher-prepared and student-prepared activity was significantly different, a t-test was carried out. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, and result of t-test for each IMI variables. The average score of *Enjoyment*, or intrinsic motivation, in student-prepared activity ($M = 39.1$, $SD = 7.3$) was higher than that of teacher-prepared activities ($M = 38.9$, $SD = 8.1$). However, the result of t-test indicates that this difference was not significant, $t(80) = -0.10$, $p > .92$. In other words, the students in this study did not regard student-prepared activity as a more intrinsically engaging activity than the teacher-prepared activity, or vice versa.

The results from other t-tests also revealed that the students gained a somewhat similar perception from the two activities. As shown in Table 1, the means of three motivational variables, namely, *Competence*, *Relatedness*, and *Value/ Usefulness*, were all higher in the student-prepared activity ($M = 30.1$, $SD = 6.3$; $M = 33.3$, $SD = 5.4$; $M = 33.6$, $SD = 5.6$, respec-

Table 1
Mean Scores and t-test result

	Number of items	Teacher-prepared		Student-prepared		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Enjoyment	7	38.9	8.1	39.1	7.3	-0.10	0.92
Competence	6	29.5	6.7	30.1	6.3	-0.44	0.66
Relatedness	6	32.6	6.3	33.3	5.4	-0.54	0.59
Value/ Usefulness	6	32.7	7.8	33.6	5.6	0.56	0.29

Note: Significant at $p < .05$ level

tively) than the teacher- prepared activity ($M = 29.5$, $SD = 6.7$; $M = 32.6$, $SD = 6.3$; $M = 32.7$, $SD = 7.8$, respectively). Nonetheless, the result of t-test comparison indicates that there were no significant differences between these means, $t(80) = -0.44$, -0.54 and 0.56 , respectively (See Table 1 for p). In other words, although a more positive attitude was shown toward the student-prepared activity, students found similar level of competitiveness, relatedness and usefulness in the two activities.

Relation of Intrinsic Motivation and other IMI Variables

In the second set of analysis, the correlation between *Enjoyment*, which represents the degree of intrinsic motivation, and other five IMI variables was tested. By analyzing these correlations, the IMI variables that strongly correlated with the students' intrinsic motivation were identified (Table 2). From the data in Table 2, it is apparent that three variables, *Competence*, *Value/Usefulness*, and *Relatedness* are strongly correlated with *Enjoyment*, or intrinsic motivation. However, interestingly, the strength of the correlation differed between the two activities.

As shown in Table 2, in case of the teacher-prepared activity, *Competence* marked the strongest correlation with *Enjoyment*, significant at .0001 level, $r(43) = .83$. *Competence* elu-

cidates the students' confidence level in their capability to accomplish the activity. Perhaps, students felt a profound sense of accomplishment by completing a somewhat challenging task offered by the teacher. This feeling of reward may have led students to gain confidence in their competence, and as a consequence, enhance their intrinsic motivation toward learning English. Following *Competence*, *Value/Usefulness* ($r = .82$, $p < 0.001$) and *Relatedness* ($r = .81$, $p < 0.001$) correlated strongly with *Enjoyment*. Apparently, the relationship between these three variables and intrinsic motivation was over all significantly high.

On the other hand, the IMI variables that most correlated with the intrinsic motivation were *Competence*, *Value/Usefulness* and *Relatedness* for the student-prepared activities as well. However, the order of the higher-correlated variables was different from the teacher-prepared activity. The most highly correlated IMI variable, in case of student-prepared activity, was *Value/Usefulness*, at the specified .0001 level, $r(43) = .87$. This IMI variable indicates the learners' perception of the target activity's practicality to learn and understand a certain grammar point. Enhanced learning and understanding through peer-teaching is also reported in Bradford-Watts's (2011) study. As described in Bradford-Watt's (2011) study, by planning and discovering

Table 2*IMI variables ordered according to the strength of correlation with Enjoyment*

Teacher-prepared		Student-prepared	
Variable	<i>r</i>	Variable	<i>r</i>
Competence	0.83	Value/ Usefulness	0.87
Value/ Usefulness	0.82	Relatedness	0.84
Relatedness	0.81	Competence	0.74

Note: All significant at $p < .001$ level

ways to teach a grammar point, students seem to have developed confidence in their knowledge. In fact, several students reflected on this point in the open-ended survey of this study, such as, “Since we were responsible to “explain” the grammar, we were naturally deepening our understanding.” and “By teaching each other within the group, I was able to confirm my comprehension.”. As these comments reveal, students in this study appear to have found some benefits from the student-prepared activity.

In addition to the *Value/Usefulness*, two IMI variables, *Relatedness* and *Competence*, correlated most significantly with intrinsic motivation at .001 level, $r(43) = .84$, .74, respectively. Surprisingly, *Competence*, which showed the highest correlation for the teacher-prepared activity, was the least in terms of student-prepared activity. What is more, *Competence* was the only IMI variable that did not reach a .80 correlation.

Analysis of Open-ended Questionnaire

After analyzing the statistical data, the open-ended part of the questionnaire was coded and analyzed in order to develop a concrete view of students’ perception. The questionnaire asked, “How did you feel about the student-prepared activity, in which the students took the teacher’s role?”. The analyzed comments for this question are summarized below

(Table 3).

Just like the quantitative questionnaire, the number of open-ended comments which expressed enjoyment, such as “The activity was fun”, was higher for the student-prepared activity. Overall, the student-prepared activity received more positive feedbacks than the teacher-prepared activity. Interestingly, however, comments related to *Relatedness*, such as “I was able to make new friends”, “I was able to become better friends with my classmates” were more found in the teacher-prepared activity. Out of many possible reasons for such a result, when the activities were implemented might have been the cause of this gap. The teacher-prepared activity was implemented from the first week of class. Until the student-prepared activity project had started, students had participated in multiple types of pair and group activities. Through these teacher-prepared activities, students might have already built strong friendship with one another. In fact, comments like “I was able to make new friends” were written in the teacher-prepared activity, but not in the student-prepared activity.

As seen in Table 3, there was no major difference between the number of comments related to *Competence* between the two activities. In spite of this identical result, however, the type of competence that the learners obtained from the activity seemed to differ. On

Table 3
Comments described in the open-ended questionnaire

	<u>Number of respondents</u>	
	Teacher-prepared	Student-prepared
Enjoyment	20	26
Relatedness	18	13
Competence	6	8

Note: Number of total respondents for teacher-prepared activity was 43. As for student-prepared activity, the number was 39.

one hand, the teacher-prepared activity offered learners broad grammatical knowledge and skills. Although the participants of this study were beginner level EFL students, these grammar points were not new. Students wrote comments such as “I was able to refresh my knowledge and skill, but my knowledge is still shallow.” On the other hand, students were able to acquire a profound knowledge about the grammar point they were responsible to teach. To be concise, while the students had explored a certain grammar point in detail, other grammar points remained somewhat ambiguous. Comments such as “I couldn’t really learn new things from other groups” was revealed by several students. This is in contrast with Bradford-Watts’s (2011) study, in which most of the students had appreciated the comprehensive explanation from peer-teaching.

Summary and Discussion

Through an analysis of closed- and open-ended questionnaire, this study examined the effectiveness of student-prepared activity on learners’ intrinsic motivation. First, the result of t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between the impacts of two activities on students’ intrinsic motivation. In other words, learners in this study found similar level of intrinsic rewards from teacher-pre-

pared and student-prepared activities. In addition, the correlation of *Enjoyment* with other IMI variables was identified. Surprisingly, although *Competence*, *Value/Usefulness*, and *Relatedness* were the three most strongly correlating variables in both of the activities, the order of strength differed. To be specific, *Competence* was the most highly correlated for the teacher-prepared activity, but *Value/ Usefulness* was the strongest for the student-prepared activity. Lastly, the comments from open-ended questionnaire revealed that learners developed different competencies from the two activities.

Different Way of Promoting Intrinsic Motivation

Although the present study aimed to identify a gap between the motivational influences of student- and teacher-prepared activity, there was only slight difference between the two activities. Such a result seems to imply that both activities promote intrinsic motivation, but in a unique way. In case of teacher-prepared activity, students were able to reconfirm and apply their basic grammatical knowledge. In the open-ended questionnaire, students commented that these activities were useful to check their comprehension. By practicing the grammar through teacher-controlled, but communicative activity, learners were able to increase their linguistic compe-

tence. Such linguistic competence plays a significant role in promoting intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In brief, teacher-prepared activity reconfirmed and reinforced the students' grammatical competence, and therefore, encouraged learners' intrinsic motivation.

In contrast, the student-prepared activity seems to promote learners' awareness of how interesting an individual can use the learnt grammar. From the statistical view, when learners participated in the student-prepared activity, their intrinsic motivation best correlated with *Value/ Usefulness*. The open-ended questionnaire further added descriptive explanation to this finding. In the questionnaire, the learners emphasized the excitement of constructing a grammatical activity by themselves. For instance, one of the students noted, "We learnt and practiced using grammar in regular classes, but this activity was a totally different experience. I discovered new ways to utilize my English". This excitement may have derived from learners' enjoyment in learning the target grammar aspect.

The deficiency of this student-prepared task was the lack of experiencing such an excitement through other grammatical points. In case of beginner learners, focusing on multiple grammar aspect could be too confusing (Brown, 2007). Therefore, the student-prepared activity project in this study tasked the learners to focus on one single grammar factor. This deficiency might have been the reason why *Competence* did not correlate that much with the *Enjoyment* statistically.

Implication

Based on the results from the present study,

teacher-prepared and student-prepared activities seem to benefit beginner-level university EFL students differently. The teacher-prepared activity promotes learners' intrinsic motivation by fulfilling their basic grammar needs. Meanwhile, the student-prepared activity motivated learners by encouraging a creative use of this basic knowledge. Thus, the combination of these two approaches would holistically influence learners' intrinsic motivation.

As Brown (2007) clearly points out, to EFL learners who are at the beginning level, "a teacher should be the presentation of material in simple segments that don't overwhelm" (p.112) the learners. The result from the present study also found teacher-prepared activity effective in terms of reconfirming and broadening basic grammatical knowledge. However, university EFL beginners seem to find this approach not that challenging. Although these EFL learners lack basic grammatical skills, these false beginners have practiced numerous grammar points during junior and senior high school. Reconfirmation of the knowledge seems unsatisfactory to intrinsically motivate these students. By implementing a student-prepared activity project, therefore, learners could find their own value in using that grammar. Such an enhancement of creativity is likely to increase learners' intrinsic motivation (Brown, 2007).

Conclusion

On the whole, students in this study cooperated closely to create unique and interactive activities for their class. Although their intrinsic motivation did not significantly increase through this peer-teaching project statistical-

ly, students found benefits to deepen and share their knowledge with their classmates. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data implied that the combination of both teacher-prepared and student-prepared activity is helpful for beginner-level students.

The present study attempted to closely examine the beginner level EFL's peer-teaching, which had not been carried out thoroughly in the past studies. However, there are certain limitations. The current study was relatively small in scale, and therefore, the result might be difficult to generalize. Participation of larger and diverse EFL learners may lead to a different conclusion. In addition, the student-prepared activity was implemented after the students had acquired and practiced the English grammar points through a teacher-prepared activity. Students might have reacted differently if this process was reversed. Future studies with a larger population size could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of student-prepared activity within different syllabi and contexts. It is hoped that further studies will investigate the reasons for the findings in this study, and improve lower-proficient EFL learners' intrinsic motivation.

Reference

- Bradford-Watts, K. (2011). Students teaching students? Peer teaching in the EFL classroom in Japan. *The Language Teacher*, 35(5), 31-36.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). NY: Pearson Education.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1997). Direct approaches in L2 instruction: A turning point in communicative language teaching? *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(1), 141-152.
- Dörnyei, Z., Csizer, K. (1998). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229.
- Falout, J., Murphey, T., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2008). Learner voices: Reflections on secondary education. In Kim, B. Theron, M., & Malcolm, S. (Eds.) *JALT 2007 Conference Proceeding*. (pp.231-243). Tokyo, Japan.
- Loewen, S. (2004). The occurrence and characteristics of student-initiated focus on form. In H. Reinders, H. Anderson, M. Hobbs, & J. Johnes-Parry (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Independent Learning Conference 2003*. (pp. 86-93). Auckland: Independent Learning Association Oceania.
- Long, M. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K.de Bot, R. Ginsberg, & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 39-52). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Matsunaga, J. (2007). Koukou no jugyou wa kawattaka? [Did the high school class change?]. *The English Teachers' Magazine*, 56 (7), 14-16.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2008). Eigo kyouiku kaizen jissichousa kekka gaiyou: koutougakkou [The result of survey on improvement in English education at Secondary school level], Retrieved September 6, 2013, from: http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/1261353.htm
- Richards, J.C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan, R. M. (1982). Control and information in the intrapersonal sphere: An extension of

- cognitive evaluation theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 450–461.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54–67.
- Sakui, K. (2004). Wearing two pairs of shoes: Language teaching in Japan. *ELT Journal*, 58, 155–163.
- Underwood, P. R. (2012). Teacher beliefs and intentions regarding the instruction of English grammar under national curriculum reforms: A theory of planned behavior perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 911–925.